

13 October 2020

Dear Parishioner,

As Election Day draws near, I want to remind you that every Catholic eligible to vote is obliged to become informed on political issues and candidates, including the moral aspects and implications of these positions. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2255) says, “It is the duty of citizens to work with civil authority for building up society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom.”

Civil law exists for a well-ordered community to promote the common good. A civil law that seeks just the good of a privileged group of society while neglecting the rest is unjust. Civil law is based on the natural law. The natural law is the objective order established by God that allows people to thrive and reach their full potential. Natural law can be known by human reason alone. So, for example, any reasonable person can know that certain acts—for example, murder, rape, and theft—are always and everywhere morally wrong. Since these acts violate human dignity, civil laws that prohibit these acts are both just and necessary.

As Catholics, we must scrutinize civil laws with a well-formed conscience based on the Church’s teaching. An objective moral evil can never be declared by morally good by civil authorities. Civil laws—for example, permitting slavery, abortion, euthanasia, and so-called marriages between persons of the same gender violate God’s moral law. They must be opposed by voters and elected officials.

Admittedly, civil laws that permit abortion, pornography, divorce, etc. do not ‘compel’ anyone to violate the moral law. But they damage the common good—how people interact with each other and how we interact with society at large. Voters and elected officials are obliged to oppose these unjust laws and struggle to change them by legal or political means.

Civil laws that compel individuals to violate the natural law and their Christian conscience must also be opposed. Examples include compelling pharmacists to dispense birth control or abortifacient drugs, requiring businesses to offer health insurance abortion coverage and coercing business owners to violate their consciences by participating in same-sex ‘marriage’ celebrations.

‘Legal positivism’ separates civil law from moral law. This kind of erroneous thinking reveals itself in the elected official who claims, “I am personally opposed to abortion; however, abortion is the law of the land, and as a lawmaker I must respect women’s right to abortion.” Or the soldier who knowingly participates in the torture of prisoners of war and says, “I was only following orders.”

Morality is not subjective or relative. A civil law permitting or compelling an objective moral wrong cannot somehow turn it into a moral good. There are always certain acts that are intrinsically and always evil. ‘Good intentions’ can never change a moral evil into a moral good. Even the circumstances surrounding the act or any positive consequences resulting from it cannot change a moral evil into a moral good. The ends never justify the means.

It’s important to understand the moral teachings of the Church so you can vote with an informed conscience. It would be wrong to vote for any candidate simply along party lines. It would also be wrong to vote for any candidate, knowing that he or she supports an objective moral evil, the first of which is the killing of innocent

human life in the womb of the mother. Support for this grave moral evil disqualifies a candidate from public office no matter what his or her position is on other issues, whether it be the COVID-19 response, the economy, or foreign policy.

**Practice for Heaven: True Stories from a Modern Missionary** contains selections of Edward Cardinal Egan's writings while he was Bishop of Bridgeport, Connecticut (1998-2000) and Cardinal Archbishop of New York (2000-2009). The following is from two chapters: "Someone Who Doesn't Love Them?" and "Costco and Mayonnaise." It's my hope that his words will touch your heart as you decide how to vote.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rev. Fr. Michael Kottar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Fr. Michael Kottar  
Parish Priest

"The Children's Rehabilitation Center is one of the proudest boasts of Catholic health care in the Archdiocese of New York. It is located in White Plains and cares for youngsters with the most serious of physical and psychological disabilities. In the fall, I had the pleasure of visiting the Center in the company of its gifted and dedicated medical director, Dr. Maria Pici, and members of its staff and its board of directors. We moved from room to room. In one, tots with Down syndrome, spinal bifida, and the disabling effects of meningitis were being led through games designed to teach them to identify shapes and colors. In another, older children who could not see or speak were being cleverly instructed by means of rhythm and music. And in all, highly professional doctors, nurses, and staff persons were showering upon their young charges the best that medical science has to offer, plus a measure of love and compassion that could not help but touch the heart.

One room, however, made a particularly deep impression on me. On its floor was spread a gymnast's mat on which lay a young doctor. In front of him was a kind of highchair in which sat a boy of four years. The boy, José by name, was picking up little Styrofoam balls with the toes of his left foot and carefully placing them in a brightly colored basket situated on the mat between him and the doctor. With each success, the doctor applauded enthusiastically, and José smiled broadly. Why was this child using the toes of his left foot to pick up the Styrofoam balls? Because he had no right foot, and no hands or arms either. He was just the trunk of a boy, one leg, a head covered with shiny black hair, and a face with a smile that lit up the room. Before long, I found myself applauding along with the doctor, and with each burst of applause José rewarded me with one of his glorious smiles.

That evening, I was back in my residence on Madison Avenue. On the floor next to my desk stood a pile of publications of various kinds that I had saved over a period of weeks to read whenever there was a free moment. The two on top were newsmagazines. On the covers of both were sonogram photographs of babies within their pregnant mothers. The photographs on the covers and inside the magazines as well were nothing short of astounding. One could see everything with crystalline clarity. The beings within their mothers had round little bodies, two arms, two legs, heads on which some had hair, hands which some were waving, and faces on which were found, in several of the photographs, bright, beautiful smiles. The theme of both of the articles illustrated by the sonogram photograph was, in effect, a question: Would it be right to kill these little beings?

The articles were written with careful attention to political correctness ... both articles were careful to avoid, where they could, the use of the words babies and children to identify the beings under discussion with their little bodies, two arms, two legs, waving hands, and smiles. Hence, the beings were regularly styled "fetuses,"

again perhaps to suggest that it might be less offensive to kill or choose to kill them if they bore an unfamiliar and antiseptic designation.

As I studied the photographs, I could not get José out of my mind. Might we properly kill or choose to kill him, I asked myself, at least if we were to invent some medical-sounding Latin expression like *puerulus*, for example, to take the place of “little boy” in discussing him? Would it thus be ethical, moral, honorable, decent, or — if you will — other than manifestly evil to “terminate his life” or choose to “terminate his life,” given his at least appearing to be somewhat less than what one might expect of an ideal human being endowed by the Creator?

For anyone who ever had the pleasure of being with José and his doctor in the Children’s Rehabilitation Center, I have no doubt that the answer would be loudly and clearly in the negative. True, José does not have the arms that most human beings have and that the “fetuses” in the sonogram photographs clearly have. True, José does not have the two legs that most human beings have and that the “fetuses” in the sonogram photographs clearly have. True, José does not wave his arms as most human beings do and as several of the “fetuses” do as well. Whatever of this, he does smile as most human beings do and as several of the “fetuses” in the sonogram photographs also do; and, if we are to believe some of our greatest philosophers, there could be no more telling and compelling proof of his humanity.

Accordingly, even if someone should wish to call him *puerulus* or anything else for that matter, killing him, no more or less than choosing to kill him, would be an outrage. And, if all of this is true, what about the beings within their mothers, the beings in the sonogram photographs? Are they ethically able to be killed or chosen for killing? Would “terminating their lives” be any less wicked than doing the same for José? Some would seem to answer that the beings within their mothers are fair game to be killed or chosen for killing, but the same cannot be said of José. Their reasons, although never more than hinted at, appear to be as follows.

First, the beings in the sonogram photographs are within their mothers; and for this reason their lives can be licitly snuffed out. Were they elsewhere, the situation would be different. For me, this point of view has always evoked a rather special repugnance, and the reason is quite personal. When I was a boy, I contracted a form of infantile paralysis known as “bulbar poliomyelitis.” Victims of this malady were at that time often placed for life within huge steel cases known as “iron lungs,” outside of which they could not breathe or live. I was fortunate enough to have escaped this horror but knew of and had seen photographs of a young man in a neighboring village who had not escaped it.... From hearing my father and mother speak about the matter, I was quite secure that, whatever happened to me, wherever I had to be put, I would be protected, cared for, and loved. My location within the steel case, or anywhere else, would not make me anything less than Edward Egan, son of Thomas and Genevieve.

Second, some would feel (it could hardly be more than a feeling) that unlike the beings within their mothers, José is not to be deprived of his life because we can see him and thus recognize him to be a human being, a person much like ourselves, although considerably unlike ourselves in several rather important aspects. Why being able to be seen — or even heard, touched, or smelled — would have any relevance as regards one’s right to live, I am not sure. All the same, whatever the thought processes behind this unusual “feeling,” events have contrived to render them utterly invalid. For, thanks to the sonogram photographs, we now see the beings within their mothers, the beings with their arms, legs, waving hands, and smiles. Indeed, we see them with marvelous clarity, and we know exactly and precisely what we are seeing.

Was there ever a time when one could with honor maintain that the beings within their mothers might be legitimately killed because there was no secure and certain knowledge as to what they were? We leave that to historians. For, if there ever were such a time, it has surely passed. Look at the photographs on the covers of the two newsmagazines and the other photographs inside as well, and you will see everything clearly, poignantly, and inescapably.

The Children's Rehabilitation Center is blessed with a splendid swimming pool in which children are exercised by skilled doctors and nurses in swimming suits and goggles. The room in which the pool is located brought back bittersweet memories of a similar facility in which I had been assisted by doctors and nurses to rebuild my arms, legs, and back after polio many years ago. As we stood next to the pool, listening to the playful cries of the children echoing back and forth against the tile walls and listening, as well, to an explanation of the effectiveness of the pool for children with certain forms of paralysis, something else was tenaciously tugging at my mind and heart. Thus, it was that, with no sufficient preamble, I interrupted the conversation to ask Dr. Pici, "What about José? What is going to become of him?" Dr. Pici took hold of my arm. "Don't worry about José," she said. "He's a bright little boy. He will make it. Trust me, he will do just fine. Everyone here loves him, and everyone here feels just as you do." "And the children in the sonogram photographs?" I asked myself that evening as I sat at my desk inspecting the newsmagazines. "Is there someone who doesn't love them?"

\*\*\*\*\*

When I was a boy many years ago, I studied music with great enthusiasm and even dreamed of becoming a concert pianist. Among my heroes was the Polish keyboard master Arthur Rubinstein. I believed then, as I believe now, that no one in our time performed the works of Frédéric Chopin with the artistry that flowed from his fingers.

Some time ago, a friend of mine sent me an old copy of Time magazine (February 25, 1966), asking me to give special attention to the cover story about Rubinstein, and especially to the paragraph that he underscored. The paragraph read as follows: Rubinstein was born in 1887, in the shabby industrial town of Lodz, in Poland, where his father owned a small hand-loom factory. He was the last of seven children. "My mother did not want a seventh child," he explains, "so she decided to get rid of me before I was born. Then, a marvelous thing happened. My aunt dissuaded her, and so I was permitted to be born."

My friend reminded me that I had told him that I admired Rubinstein immensely, that I had purchased all of his recordings that I could afford when I was young, and that I had virtually worn the wax off my 78 rpm records of his performance of the Chopin sonatas. "Read the section of the article that I have marked and never forget it," my friend directed me. "If you are ever hesitant or embarrassed to stand up against that attack on the basics of civilization that is abortion, these few sentences will come in handy."

Rubinstein's mother had 'chosen' to kill him. His aunt 'chose' to take a stand against the killing, and the world was rewarded with one of our greatest musical geniuses. "The promoters of abortion are going to try to convince the man on the street, and the woman, too, that abortion is purely a matter of one's religious faith," he continued, "and some who have political obligations in this area are going to suggest that, while they are 'personally' opposed to abortion for religious reasons, they will not force their religious beliefs on others. All of this is manifest nonsense which by no means trumps the crystal-clear truth that, long before religion enters into the fray, abortion is, and always was, a patent violation of an altogether fundamental rule of civilized life. "This is truth," he concluded, "and we have to trust that one day truth will triumph here in this beloved nation of yours and mine."

I put the letter down ... and took from my collection of recordings Rubinstein's rendition of B minor and B-flat minor sonatas of Chopin. With the magical art of this wondrous artist in the background, I reread the final quotation of my boyhood hero in the Time article. Here it is: I'm passionately involved in life: I love its change, its color, its movement. To be alive, to be able to speak, to see, to walk, to have houses, music, paintings — it's all a miracle. "Yes," I mused to myself, "life is a miracle. However, before we get into miracles and other matters of a religious kind, we do well to recall that, miraculous or not, to live is first and foremost a right, a right that none of us is free to leave undefended."

*(Sophia Institute Press. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The book is available at [SophiaInstitute.com](http://SophiaInstitute.com))*